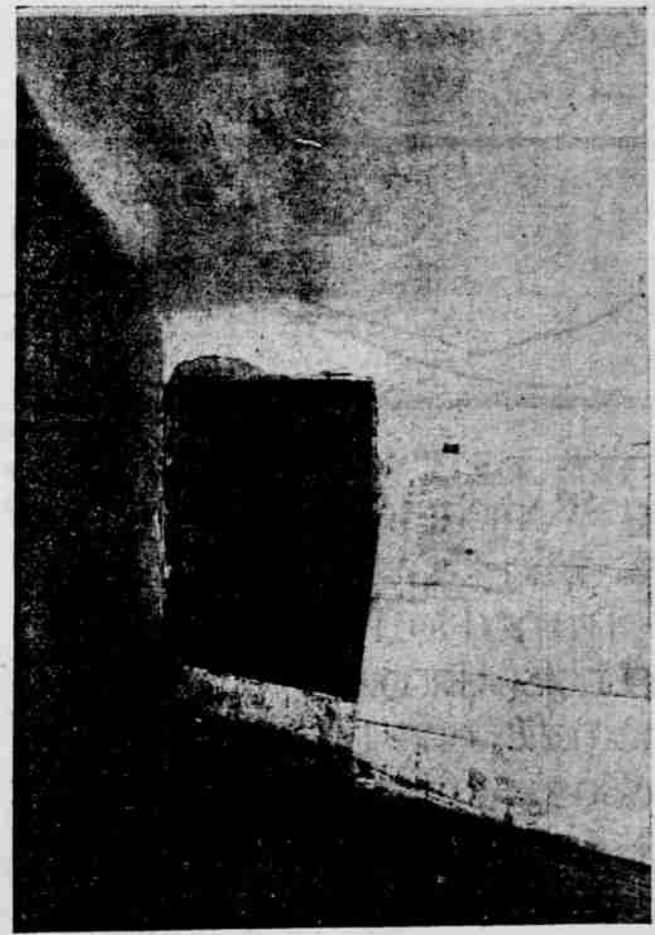


# ELIZABETH VAN LEW, THE FAMOUS UNION SPY OF RICHMOND



The Van Lew Mansion.

ELIZABETH VAN LEW,  
Famous Union Spy.

Door in Panel Leading to Secret Chamber.

Throughout the War She Carried on a System of Intrigues Which Displayed Marvelous Astuteness and Adaptation of Means to an End—Tireless Energy, Sleepless Vigilance, and Daring Intrepidity

THE spot in Richmond at present most frequented by strangers is the old Van Lew house, lately owned and occupied by Miss Elizabeth Van Lew, the famous Union spy, who rendered more assistance to the Federal Government during the civil war than any woman within the confines of the Confederacy, and carriages filled with tourists empty themselves daily before its entrance.

The place, purchased since her death, eighteen months ago, by an organization and converted into a clubhouse for men, has been renewed without being essentially altered, and here may still be seen the hollow ornamental columns on either side of the parlor mantel in which were concealed communications from General Grant and the authorities at Washington; the attic where fugitives

from Libby prison awaited an opportunity of escape through the lines; the secret chamber beneath the eaves into which they crawled when discovery threatened; the outlet through the roof for sudden flight when detection was imminent; and the strange figure on the basement wall of the mistress of the mansion herself which started out upon the application of some renovating chemical ink writing with sensitized ink when exposed to fire.

## In the Olden Style.

The house, built in 1799 by Dr. John Adams, for many years mayor of Richmond, and the son of Col. Richard Adams, a member of the House of Burgesses, fronts upon Grace Street. Its stuccoed walls, with trimmings of Scotch sandstone, brought over as ballast in pre-Revolutionary ships, rising three and a half stories high, and enclosing halls and rooms of stately proportions.

It is approached by twin semicircular stairways, with carved iron balustrades, leading up on either side to a massive stone porch; and ascending them, and passing through to the rear, one steps out upon a broad piazza, commanding an extensive and exquisite view. In the distance, with graceful curve and musical cadence, flows the historic James, while at one's feet stretches a fragrant, terraced garden, shaded with magnolia, walnut and elm trees, the homes of squirrels, and song birds, nestling in trunks and branches. Gravel walks, hedged high with boxwood, wind everywhere, leading out to summer house and rustic seats, and down to a moss-covered spring which bubbles below.

## John Van Lew, Owner.

During Dr. Adams' occupancy tradition tells of such visitors as Chief Justice Marshall and his distinguished contemporaries; while General Lafayette was his house guest during his stay in Richmond in 1824. After his death, too, when, in 1834, John Van Lew, a native of New York and the descendant of an old Knickerbocker family, purchased the property and brought his young family there to live, it was still the center of a cultured circle. Fedrika Bremer, the Swedish authoress, who made the tour

of the States, speaking with enthusiasm of her sojourn there.

Mr. Van Lew had established himself successfully in Richmond as a hardware merchant, and possessing refined tastes, with the means to gratify them, filled the beautiful house with rare books and pictures, delicate china, rich mahogany and chippendale furniture, and all the rest of the accessories of wealth and culture; and his luxurious coach, drawn by four white horses, in which the family went every summer to fashionable resorts, is still remembered by the older citizens. His wife was a daughter of Hon. Hillary Baker, once mayor of Philadelphia, a circumstance which led to her own daughter—destined to become so famous—being educated there; and this, in turn, to her adoption of the anti-slavery sentiments which shaped her course during the war. Her intimacy with Miss Bremer, too, a pronounced abolitionist, tended to emphasize her views, and during her visit to her the two drove to the "slave-selling houses" and negro jails in Richmond. Miss Van Lew, whom the authoress describes as "a pale, pleasing blonde," weeping over the sufferings of the inmates and winning her heart by her interest in them.

## Her Success as a Spy.

Had her father lived, according to one who knew them both, this interest would have found a different outlet. He died in 1860, however, and at the breaking out of hostilities a year later, his daughter inaugurated a system of intrigues, which, whether we deprecate or applaud it, according to our viewpoint, must still be admitted to evince, not

only marvelous astuteness and adaptation of means to an end, but tireless energy, sleepless vigilance and daring intrepidity.

During the years when the Federal army thundered at the gates of Richmond she was in constant communication with it; and when Grant hovered in its vicinity she kept in such close touch with him that flowers cut from her garden in the morning adorned his table at the evening meal. She spied upon the Confederacy and all of its agents, both civil and military, contriving to install her deputies in the household of President Davis as servants, and through them to acquaint herself with the result of his conferences with his cabinet. The information thus obtained was put in cipher, and concealed between an outer and inner sole of his shoe, was smuggled through the lines by a negro employed on her farm, below the city, his humble station enabling him to pass in and out unmolested by the guards.

She was also in touch with the inmates of Libby prison, ingeniously supplying them with implements with which to work their way out, and harboring them until an opportunity to elude the Confederate pickets presented itself, and was the abettor of Colonel Straight, the noted raider, who tunneled an under-

ground passage and with 1,800 prisoners, made his escape.

Her services in the cause of the Union were not positively and fully known, however, until after her death, when ex-Federal officers, who had been concealed in her house—one of whom now occupies a Government position in Washington—visited the place and disclosed the secret chamber and the movable step leading out through the roof. That her services were recognized by General Grant is evinced by the fact that, upon hearing of the evacuation of Richmond, he dispatched his aide-de-camp, Colonel Parke, to see that she was properly cared for, and when his army entered the city, paid long visits to her at her home. One of his first acts, too, after he became President, was to make her postmistress of Richmond, a position which she held for eight years, and her receipts from which amounted to \$30,000. She later had a Government position in Washington,

which she retained until Cleveland came into power, when she resigned. Her mother died in 1876, after which her home was shared by her brother and his two daughters. One by one they passed away, however, leaving her at the last alone in the old house, haunted by the memories of more than a century. Her course during the war, and her affiliation with negroes after it, alienated the people of Richmond, who withdrew from all association with her. Only one or two close friends continued to cling to her; and her pathetic plaint, when sickness and old age had overtaken her, was: "I'm so lonely; nobody loves me."

No stone marks the green mound beneath which she sleeps in Shock Hill Cemetery, but a strange coincidence identifies it. The space reserved for her in the family lot was insufficient to admit of her grave being dug in the usual way, and it lies north and south, as did those of the Federal soldiers buried in Confederate cemeteries, as did that of Ulrich Dahlgren.

## OUR FIRST DELEGATE TO CONGRESS FROM THE ISLAND OF PORTO RICO

WHEN Hon. Federico Degetau came to Washington and was presented to President McKinley a year and a half ago the President signified his pleasure in greeting the first resident commissioner sent by the people of Porto Rico, and Mr. Degetau expressed the hope that the next representative elected by the people of the island would be a Delegate.

"And I, too, hope so," replied the President. President McKinley's desire is about to be fulfilled. Mr. Degetau is shortly to be accorded a seat in the House of Representatives as a Delegate from the beautiful little island which came to us through the war with Spain.

At present the resident commissioner from Porto Rico is forced to transact his business with this Government through the State Department, much the same as would a diplomat from a foreign country. Such a method naturally is not productive of the most satisfactory results.

A bill has been prepared and already favorably reported to the House by a unanimous vote allowing Porto Rico a Delegate in the House of Representatives, who shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges accorded to the Delegates from the Territories of Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona; in fact, all the rights of members of the House save and alone the right of voting. The bill is so drawn as to permit Mr. Degetau to take his seat as soon as it is passed and approved by the President. Mr. Degetau will not only be the first representative in Congress from Porto Rico, but the first former subject of Spain to sit in that body and the first man from any of the insular possessions derived from Spain to participate in our national legislation.

Aside from these facts Mr. Degetau is interesting personally. His father was the son of a German from Altoona and an English woman whose maiden name was Wood. The name of Degetau is itself French, the family having originally emigrated from the province of Alsace-Lorraine.

The father of the present commissioner was a man who had traveled a great deal and spoke several languages. Because of his literary tastes his father established him at the head of a publishing house at Havre. He preferred to read books, however, rather than to print them, and abandoned the publishing business and went to Porto Rico as the head of a banking house in Ponce. He was a man of artistic instincts and erected the first American house on the island. He had all of its parts made and fitted in New York and transported them to Ponce. Then he engaged American carpenters and joiners to go there and put it together.

The site was in the midst of a tropical Porto Rican garden and close by a river. A short distance in the rear of the place was a bathhouse, where the

fashionable young señoritas of Ponce used to repair daily for their ablutions.

One day the elder Degetau was walking through his garden when a carriage in which there were several young Porto Rican ladies on their way to the baths drove by. He was just making arrangements for a house party preparatory to taking up his abode in the new residence which he had erected and which was considered one of the most beautiful "villas" of Ponce. When the señoritas, dressed in the latest fashion, brought over as ballast in pre-Revolutionary ships, rising three and a half stories high, and enclosing halls and rooms of stately proportions.

As they drove away again, he said to the old Belgian gardener whom he had brought over to be his servant: "Hans, you saw the youngest of those señoritas. She will be the mistress of the new house."

It was even so, for six months from that time, the young German banker was married to Señora Gonzales, one of the recognized belles of Ponce. A little less than two years later their son Federico, the present resident commissioner from Porto Rico, was born in the first American house built on the island. The elder Degetau died when the present commissioner was but eight months old, and his entire training and education were left in the hands of his mother.

She was a woman of high refinement and literary tastes, and to her influence Mr. Degetau attributes all his success in life. She devoted her entire time and attention and a large part of her fortune to the education of her son.

Under her tutelage he acquired a highly cultivated literary taste, especially for the English classics, of which Mrs. Degetau was very fond. Mr. Degetau's early education was received at the schools of the island and at the Instituto de Segunda Enseñanza in San Juan, which was closed by the government in 1874. After that his mother took him to Spain where he continued his studies in the Central University at Madrid and also at the universities of Salamanca and Granada.

While a young man he was elected by the Academy of Anthropological Sciences at Madrid to the presidency of the department of moral and political sciences. His mother died in Madrid twelve years ago.

Mr. Degetau is a lawyer by profession, but has devoted a great deal of his time toward the improvement of political conditions in Porto Rico, and ever since he entered the arena of Porto Rican politics he has been recognized as a leader and one of the foremost men of the island. He espoused the cause of a republican form of government, and in 1896 was one of the four commissioners sent by Porto Rico to Spain in the interests of autonomy. In the convention which selected the delegates, one of his colleagues on the Commission who was a monarchist, in answer to Mr. Degetau's argument in favor of making Spain a republic, declared that such a change would not be accomplished in an hundred years. To this Mr. Degetau replied that either Spain would be a republic within two years or the civilized world will interfere in her affairs, and she would be a leader and one of the foremost men of the island. The recent history of the world is a fulfillment of Mr. Degetau's prophecy. She was not made a republic, but within two years she did sign a treaty withdrawing from Cuba, ceding



FEDERICO DEGETAU.

MRS. DEGETAU.

Porto Rico to the United States and relinquishing sovereignty over the Philippines. In 1898 Mr. Degetau was elected a deputy to the Cortez in Madrid. Then came the American occupancy of the island. When General Henry was made governor of the island he appointed Mr. Degetau as secretary of interior for the island, and his administration of the affairs of the office was such as to call

forth an expression of the highest praise from the American commander when Mr. Degetau resigned.

While the Peace Commission was negotiating in Paris, Mr. Degetau went there and materially assisted in the preparation of the treaty in so far as it related to the island of Porto Rico. He advocated an arbitration clause, and obtained the agreement for the free

entry of English and Spanish books into the island.

In 1900 Mr. Degetau was a candidate of the Republican party of Porto Rico for the office of commissioner to the United States. The term "Republican" does not signify in Porto Rico what it does in the United States. He was accorded the nomination and was elected almost unanimously, receiving 58,367

votes against less than 200 for his opponent. When he takes his seat in Congress as a Delegate he will represent the largest constituency of any man in the House of Representatives. He will represent nearly 1,000,000 people, a number four times as large as that of any man in the House. In the Spanish Cortez Porto Rico was accorded four senators and sixteen representatives, members of the Chamber of Deputies.

Mr. Degetau is the author of numerous books, essays, novels, and short stories, treating upon political, educational, and sociological subjects. That to which he has given the title "Que Quijote" ("What a Quixote") is a protest against the indifference of modern society toward the permanent laws of human solidarity. "The Redemption of a Corsair" deals with the question of philanthropy. He has written two others treating of the social slavery of children, one a circus boy and the other a little negro attached to a Porto Rican sugar plantation. "Cuentos Para el Viaje" ("Tales for the Voyage") is a collection of short stories more or less concerned with problems of environment and education. "Juveniles" ("Truth"), his last novel, contains a series of scenes in the life of young men whose fundamental aspiration is the abolition of capital punishment. The latter work is a somewhat autobiographical and is reflective in a vivid way of the author's experiences while studying in Madrid.

Mr. Degetau was married last March in Omaha to the daughter of the Count of Santa Lucia, a beautiful and accomplished young woman, who shares all of her husband's aspirations and ambitions. She is of that type of beauty for which the Spanish señoritas are famed. Their courtship had in it more than the average tinge of romance. They met in Madrid during Mr. Degetau's residence in the Spanish capital. He was an ardent republican and she the daughter of a staunch monarchist, of whose loyalty to the crown there never was a question, but barriers which the god of war cannot override are leveled with ease by the magic wand of the god of love. Educated to the belief of the divine right of kings and hereditary rule rather than popular sovereignty, the young Spanish woman of noble birth after her acquaintance with the Porto Rican statesman, became the most ardent of republicans. A little more than a year ago she came to America, and until last March, when she was married to Mr. Degetau, she resided in Omaha, where she has friends. She is now enthusiastically American, with broad and liberal ideas, fond of this country, its institutions, and proud of the fact that she is now a Porto Rican-American. Mrs. Degetau's sister, Señora Hernandez, is the wife of one of the supreme justices of Spain, and her uncle, Señor Capdepon, was a member of the liberal cabinet of Sagasta.

Mrs. Degetau is a fluent writer, speaks several languages, including English as well as an American, and is an artist of marked ability. When she left Madrid she brought with her to her future husband some of her own copies of the great masters in the National Gallery in that city. She is also an accomplished musician.

Mrs. Degetau shares with her husband his interest in philanthropic work. They have a cozy little home on P Street, which is filled with the handwork of its mistress. Mrs. Degetau expects to make her first visit to her adopted home in Porto Rico probably this summer, when Mr. Degetau returns there. He will be a candidate for re-election this fall, as his service has been very satisfactory, both to the people of Porto Rico and the officials in Washington, in whose regard he stands high. There is little or no doubt of his re-election.